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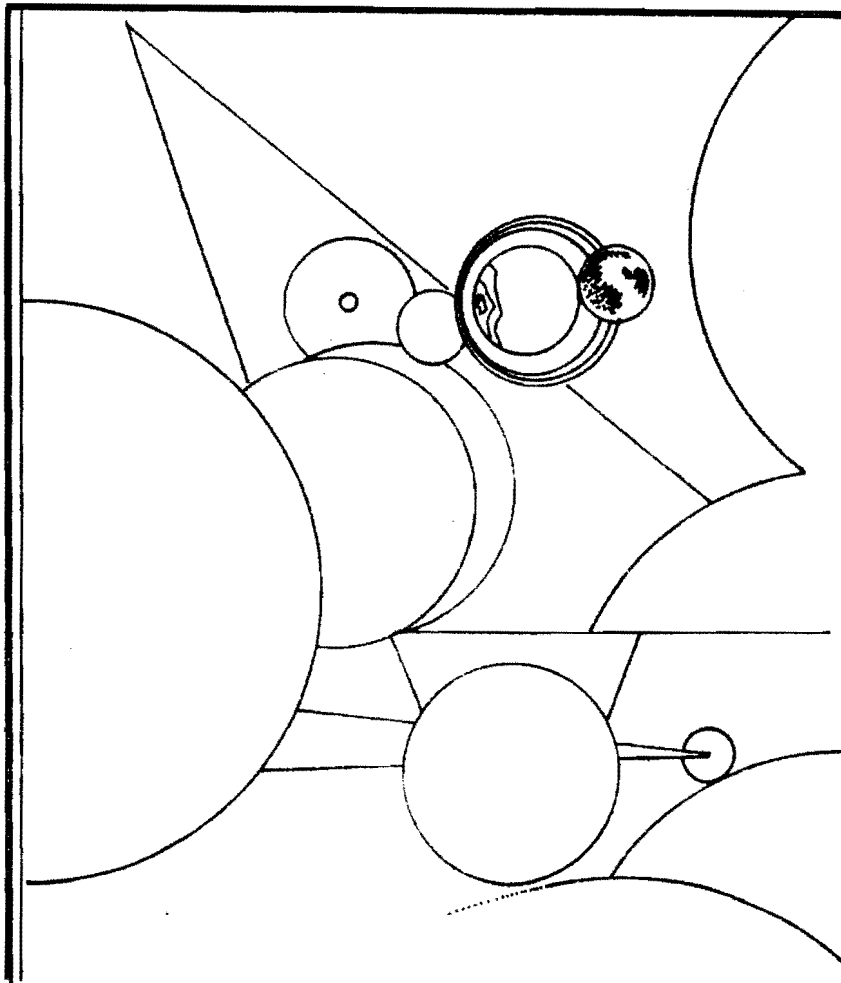
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ALDEBARAN



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Judy Belfield

Footprints

You were in my mind last night.
I didn't feel your trampling;
I was too busy thinking.
We both stopped
to admire the same ideaflovers:
some colored delicate pink
like barely tinted alabaster,
others undulating blazingly,
pulsing out of breath
in gushing shades of orange.

I wasn't aware you were there
until today
when I discovered footprints
in the mud.

Judy Belfield

Passed Down

Flat, shadowed earth
stretching out to black sky--
an Indian stood here once,
looked across the flat land
to the night horizon
into a turban of stars.
He didn't see neon
or electric,
didn't hear power bristling
through cables strung from latticed towers
trailing off to the generating station.
But he may have wondered
about the nightlights then--
the same lights here,
beyond the neon and electric;
he may have wondered
then gone his way . . .

In that moment
he left his soul to the wind
and I feel it now
trembling in sleep.

Charles Brownson

Spinach Pie

Bosse Lindors went to get another drink at the bar and when he came back, the woman he had had his eye on was talking to someone else. For a time he wandered through the suite, picking up pieces of cheese and sausage on a toothpick, trying to look purposeful. He peeked into the bathroom where the tub was full of ice and bottles of wine. At the end of the hall one of the salesmen was talking, softly and rapidly, to the woman in the hound's-tooth suit. Her name-tag was pinned on sideways; Bosse had not been able to get close enough to see where she was from. She was a head taller than the salesman and quite soused. Bosse returned to the living room. He took up a station beside the peanuts and gazed from the window at the city traffic twenty-five floors below. The wet streets gleamed. He would have liked to put his head out, into the cold wind.

Oh, said a voice at his elbow. You're from the desert.

Yes. It was the hound's-tooth woman again. He peered shamelessly at her breast. ALA Headquarters Staff. A native.

Have you been to Chicago before?

He lied on a whim.

Oh, excuse me, she said. I see John.

She wandered away, picked up another plastic cup of white wine from the row set out on the bar counter, and stopped to talk to a woman from New Jersey.

Brownson

Bosse shuffled through the invitations in his pocket and went to get his coat from the bedroom, where a group of five were arguing about where to go for dinner. He glanced at the odd woman with short-lived curiosity.

Another vendor was giving a reception in the same hotel. While he waited for the elevator, Bosse looked again at the room number printed on the admission card. It was one of Woody's extras. An administrator's perk to distribute tickets. Bosse had spent the afternoon in the exhibits and had picked up a mountain of flyers and catalogs and literature about security systems and on-line catalogs and library tables, but no invitations. He hadn't expected any, being only a reference librarian, his distance from budget decisions measured by the number of catalogs and brochures on furniture which he carried about with him.

He had met Fluellen in the exhibits. The computer systems man was carrying a blue and white plastic shopping bag from University Microfilms, stuffed with posters for his children. Bosse cadged a ticket to the Rattlesnake party from him. Fluellen rummaged in all his pockets and ended by towing Bosse over to the Rattlesnake booth in the next aisle, where he abandoned him to a desultory conversation about on-line public catalogs until the salesman could be rescued by a possible customer.

The elevator carried Bosse up five floors. It was not hard to find the party: the door was open and shouting and laughter filled the

Brownson

hallway. A salesman broke off conversation as Bosse entered, long enough to point out the bar and the coat room.

Woody was here, holding a small court in one corner. Bosse passed up the iced wine for a bourbon and soda and made his way across to her.

The talk was about Rattlesnake. Scanning the name-tags, Bosse recognized two other installations of the Rattlesnake system, neither one quite as far along as his own library, to whom Woody was passing on some intelligence on the progress of software for the public access catalog.

Bosse turned to the woman beside him, a young redhead in jeans and a gray sportcoat. Computers, he commented, have certainly changed library conventions, haven't they?

She turned to him, their eyes dropping surreptitiously at the same moment to read each other's badges. NELINET. Another administrative zit. Didn't anyone work in libraries anymore?

He wagged a finger between their badges, taking a chance. I begin to understand, he said, how women feel.

Quick hostility.

About men always looking down their blouses.

The redhead moved off. A squatty person who had been standing on the other side of her took him up.

What were you saying about the convention?

That computers have changed things a good deal. We used to talk about compact

Brownson

shelving and catalog rules. Now it's information and data bases and fixed fields. Where are you from?

He bent down.

Oneonta. Where's that?

Upstate. Between Albany and Binghamton.

Ah. He still didn't know where it was.

And what do you do? the squatty person wanted to know.

Reference.

Do you charge a fee for data base searches?

He quoted an outrageous sum. The person from Oneonta frowned and turned to another neighbor.

What do you charge for on-line searches?

Eh? The neighbor, who had been listening to what Woody was saying about data conversion, turned and bent down.

Oneonta. Where's that?

Bosse moved off to refill his glass. At the bar he managed to restart the conversation about transformations in librarianship with an Asian woman from California, but she tired of it after a few moments and excused herself. He secured himself a piece of cheese by pushing in between two men in dark suits, but the crackers were gone. The sausage from the last party had upset his stomach. Eight o'clock. It was better than eating alone.

He was thinking of moving on to the Hilton when Woody hailed him. We have reservations at a Greek place up the street, she said. Would you like to join us?

It was half an hour more before the party could be assembled. They were seven, three

Brownson

men and four women, including the Boston redhead. It had quit raining. Everyone seemed to know where they were going. They straggled along the sidewalk, talking loudly, laughing when one of the men lost his footing on the slimy pavement. Bosse dropped back to talk to Woody.

I saw Michael Fluellen in the exhibits this afternoon.

Yes. I flew out with him.

Oh. I didn't come 'til yesterday. Is Tue Cardon here?

I don't believe so. You know that he's not living with her anymore.

No, he said, flushing. I didn't know.

He's sharing a place with Gregory Ibarra.

What? Is he gay now?

Woody chuckled gently. I doubt it.

Non-plussed, Bosse was silent.

You and Michael are not on such good terms as you used to be, Woody observed.

Bosse cleared his throat and admitted they were not. The man who had slipped on the sidewalk dropped back to take Woody's arm.

Where is this place, Jen? I thought you said it was just down the street.

And so it is, Woody replied, pointing. Bill, let me introduce you to Bosse Lindfors, one of our reference librarians. Bill was with me at Illinois.

Oh yes, said Bill. We've been around a long time, haven't we, Jen? He put out a thin, pale hand to Bosse.

I've never heard you called Jen before.

No, allowed Woody, I don't suppose you have.

Brownson

The restaurant was hot and noisy. Bill peered nearsightedly over the rims of his fogged glasses. The four who had gone ahead had already secured the table. Bosse found himself seated between Bill and a long-faced woman who extended her hand and gave a name which Bosse didn't catch. The redhead had placed herself well away, across the table.

There was another round of drinks. Dinner was ordered, but the mixture of alcohols that Bosse had put down was beginning to tell and he forgot his choice at once. The long-faced woman broke off her conversation with the man on the other side of her to speak to Bosse.

Didn't I hear you saying something to Mai-ling earlier about computer access?

To who?

Oh, Bob's wife. The rep? Woody says you're reference?

Ah..yes. Yes indeed.

Well, I was quite taken with what you were saying.

Bosse made a small deprecating noise.

No, I think you're absolutely right. We invented these people. For ten years we were their only customers. We were the only ones who could afford the service, and the only ones with the expertise to interpret it to the public. If it weren't for us, these people would have just started in business. And now when a better-paying customer comes along they turn and bite us. I think it's shameful.

Bosse buried his nose in his drink, gathering his wits. This was not at all what he

Brownson

had been saying earlier, and he wasn't sure it was safe to let Longface credit him with such an attack on the data base vendors. But the woman went on without waiting for social noises from him.

Look at full-text, she was saying. Doesn't everyone want full text? My God, you sit at home with your micro punching up research in education. You want to teach philosophy to first-graders, or something like that. So here's a brand-new lesson plan from some school on the coast. You don't want to wait a month for it on inter-library loan. And who gets full text? Corporate executives. Investment portfolio managers. Why don't they put the National Assessment of Educational Progress data tapes on-line? There are on-line statistics for used-car salesmen, for chrissake.

Dinner was being served. Bosse glanced around the table and concluded that he had copied Bill's order. He pointed.

What's that?

Spanakopitta.

What?

Spinach pie, Bill said, cutting into it.

With cucumbers and yogurt. White wine with pine tar in it. Goat's milk cheese. He wondered if he had ordered dessert.

Librarians, he said, turning back to the long-faced woman. He tucked a piece of cucumber in his cheek and waved his fork recklessly, spattering yogurt on the tablecloth. He had decided to take what credit he could.

Librarians are being squeezed out of the market. Ten years ago, three years ago even,

Brownson

vending on-line data bases was a small business. Two companies. Three. Now there are twenty. Ten years ago, the vendors could handle all the instruction themselves. Who was involved? A few thousand librarians. You go to one of these on-line users groups now, or a refresher seminar on search technique, and who is there? Corporate secretaries and free-lance information brokers. If we don't move in on these people in another ten years we'll be small-time consumers with minority interests, providing information services only to people who can't provide for themselves because they're too poor or too stupid. What kind of a constituency is that? We don't control access to the data bases anymore. Anyone with a shoebox computer can get in. What we ought to do is take instruction away from the vendors. It's way beyond their capacities already. Only the big-time consumers are getting any systematic help. I mean, just the introductory instruction is two days and costs more than the shoebox computer does.

Bosse hastily forked off a chunk of spinach pie, tucked it away in his cheek, and went on at once to avoid being interrupted.

So who, he said, is going to be the expert here? You're sitting at home, punching up lesson plans for first-grade philosophy classes. You're getting stuff on first language acquisition and a stack of dissertations on Husserl. Who do you call for help? You ought to call the school librarian, dammit, not some toll-free customer service desk in Palo Alto. You ought to call the public library.

Brownson

Automatically, without thinking about it, like you do when you get in an argument about Lou Gehrig's batting average. Why should we get only the bar questions? When customer service has them backed up thirty deep with questions about ending and oring they are going to ring off, and if we aren't going to pick up the slack then H&R Block will, and we'll be left with baseball trivia and neatening up the shelves.

Unintentionally, Bosse had allowed himself to become impassioned. The whole table had fallen silent. But he didn't know what to do with their attention, and looked down at his plate. The spinach pie was gone. After a moment, conversation resumed. A success. Bosse smiled to himself.

The long-faced woman introduced him to the man sitting on her other side. Frank. A square little man with black greasy hair and an enormous moustache, who almost knocked over his wine glass as he put out his hand. Frank was an assistant-to.

When I was a baby librarian, Frank said, I came back late from lunch one day, and the director made me neat up the shelves as punishment. My God but she was an awful old woman. It's no wonder people wonder what it is we do for a living. Times have changed, eh?

Bosse swallowed a little of the wine, hoping to settle his stomach. During dessert, he kept up his end of the conversation with a theory about bowling and ping-pong mentalities which he had heard under similar

Brownson

circumstances from a gerontologist at a faculty reception. The bowling mentality, so the idea went, has to get all the pins set up before he can throw an argument at them, whereas the ping-pong mind responds to the situation it finds. The bowler is thus seriously disadvantaged in conversation.

Out on the street it had begun to rain again. The restaurant was closing, and the seven of them huddled in the vestibule working out the taxis. Woody and Bill, it developed, were going to a late set at a famous jazz club. The fourth man, who seemed to be with the woman from Boston, claimed there was a taxi stand on the corner and went out to procure another one to take them across town to a bar which he was recommending. Frank put out his hand to Bosse, and then Bosse was buttoning up his coat alone in the vestibule of a Greek restaurant he hadn't yet learned the name of. He had ordered dessert for himself after all, which had proved to be a sort of cookie about half an inch thick, and he cleaned his teeth of the remains of this as he walked the dozen blocks back to his hotel.

In his room, he threw his wet clothes into a heap on the tiled bathroom floor and began to towel himself off. He had hoped the rain would revive him, but it hadn't.

All at once his gorge rose and he put his head into the stool.

Before bed he took aspirin and a massive dose of vitamin B-complex, which he had been told was good for hangovers. It did seem to work.

Brownson

Tomorrow was Saturday, the third day of a six-day conference. He had scheduled for himself a meeting of LITA on telecommunications and another on European data bases, a GODORT meeting on machine-readable cataloging of government documents, a session on library services to American Indians, and an RTSD seminar on video disks and public access to microcomputers. He glanced through the two pages of acronyms at the back of the program, looking for the sponsor of the meeting on Indians.

Reluctantly he put out the light.

J. D. Collier

Danny

It was drizzling through the Saturday morning mist - a perfect day for sleeping late. But my three kids, the dog, the cat and my wife, who has a fetish about making up beds, were already finished with breakfast. So I finally got up and began to consider all the things I could not do that day because of the rain.

The sound of children's bickering had begun to drown out the cartoons blaring on both television sets. My oldest, a girl, was in control of one set tuned to channel 2, while my youngest, a boy, was in control of the other, on channel 4. Danny, the five-year-old, wanted to watch channel 7. This was going to be a problem day.

Now, problems have always been problems to me and opportunities have always been opportunities. I have always admired people who can turn problems into opportunities; I don't know how I did it that particular Saturday.

Suddenly, though, amidst all this bedlam and dreariness, a virtuous feeling came over me. I decided to devote the day to becoming a teacher, friend, and all-around-good-guy father to Danny.

Remembering nostalgically my own childhood, I conjured up a vision of happy, rainy days spent building model airplanes. Here was an opportunity to share with Danny the challenge, the concentrated effort, the

Collier

feeling of pride in accomplishment. To build a model airplane is to build a boy's character.

I dressed and intercepted Danny between arguments, explaining to him what great fun he and I were going to have building a model airplane. My enthusiasm continued to grow even when he looked at me curiously and asked why.

I hustled him out the door and into the car and, while the tires hissed on the wet pavement and the windshield wipers slapped cadence, I hummed a few bars of "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder..." It had been twenty years since I last cemented wing struts in place, but that didn't matter. I felt really good.

After combing through the drug store and the variety store, I was a little discouraged. Their toy departments had assorted model spaceships, dragsters, trucks, wild animals, monsters and, even human beings with transparent plastic skin and brightly colored internal organs. But no model airplanes. The model industry had gone through an astounding expansion in the last twenty years.

A nice salesclerk in the variety store gave me directions to a hobby shop all the way across town and we drove over. Danny had to stop at a service station to use the bathroom and I checked the Yellow Pages directory.

We found the shop and I took Danny inside. We were no longer trying to keep dry. The owner of the shop was a kindly old man who looked like Santa Claus and he was, naturally, a model enthusiast himself. I could

Collier

tell that he thought I was over my head but Danny represented a lot of future sales to the old man, so he patiently showed us his whole assortment of models. I resisted the temptation to switch to a monstrous, four-masted clipper ship with little figurines rolling barrels along the deck.

We settled at last on a beautiful Navy biplane designed circa 1936. A Grumman Navy Fighter F3F-3. I might have built that very plane when I was a boy. I didn't remember it exactly but, still, it was a comforting thought.

I held the brightly colored box down for Danny to examine while the old man recited the history of that airplane and several others. He made me feel guilty for only buying one. I promised, though, that we would certainly be back for more when this one was assembled. He smiled.

The amount he rang up on the cash register was more than I had in my wallet so I dug past the bills and handed over my credit card. Once he had a firm grip on the card, the old man leaned back and spread both hands on the counter.

"And now", he asked, "what about your building materials and tools?"

Danny stood patiently with a blank look on his face.

"The works", I said weakly.

The old man efficiently picked from the chaotic shelves and made a neat arrangement on the counter - plastic glue, razor blades, grey thread, two paint brushes, bottles of yellow, red, apple green, silver, gloss black,

Collier

flat black and flesh-colored paint. He then rang everything up, fingers flying, and scooped the whole assortment into a bag.

Handing me the bag and my credit card, he grinned again.

"Have a good time. And, good luck."

Driving home, I began to hum again. The rain showed no sign of letting up. Danny asked if I would help him build a table for his treehouse. I could tell that we were beginning to communicate on a more meaningful level.

It was raining even harder when we arrived home. I parked in the driveway and ducked into the house, hunched over the bag to protect it from the rain. Danny's mother took him upstairs to dry his head and change his clothes. I spread the box, building materials and tools neatly out on the breakfast-room table. But, it was lunchtime, so I bagged it all again and leaned against the kitchen counter while the kids ate. Even though kids seem to gulp their food, they actually eat very slowly. I had never noticed that.

Lunch over, we were ready to begin. I wanted this to be a shared experience right from the start, so I let Danny spread newspapers over the table while I unwrapped the box and took out the instruction sheet. It unfolded into the equivalent of eight pages, single-spaced. Many of the forty-four steps, however, contained little diagrams and photographs, and I was confident. The other two kids stood silently watching.

Collier

I arranged the plastic trees, sprouting their tiny numbered parts like leaves, on the newspaper in front of me and instructed Danny not to touch them.

(Step 1. I found the two parts and fit them together, being careful not to cement them.) I went upstairs to get a pair of tweezers from the medicine cabinet. While I was doing this, my younger son and daughter wandered off to their respective television sets. It was only natural for Danny to want to follow them but I gave him the little grey pilot to hold.

(Step 2. Told me to take two more anonymous parts and fit them together, again not cementing. It suggested a toothpick.) While I was rummaging through all the kitchen drawers, my wife came downstairs and asked if she could help with anything. Danny asked if we were almost finished.

(Step 3. Involved an oleo strut.) I was getting comfortable with the technology. Also, I got to use both the razor blade and the glue. I sliced my finger on the razor and had to go upstairs for the iodine and a bandaid. No time was lost, however, because the glue had to set.

(Step 4. Was very complicated and involved a moving part of some kind.) I let Danny apply a drop of glue but he squeezed a little too hard. Plastic cement is really a chemical that permanently defaces any plastic that it touches. When I was a boy, glue was different.

Collier

(Step 5. We had completed the right landing gear and were told to set it aside.) Danny went to the window, said that it had stopped raining, and that he was going outside to build the table for his treehouse. Before I could explain to him the virtue of persistence, my daughter came back into the room and sat down in Danny's chair.

(Step 6. Was the left landing gear, and the instructions were the same. Only, the parts were mirror images of ones I had just used.) I slapped my daughter's hand for picking up Step 5, which was not yet dry, and she ran bawling to her room.

I was on Step 9 when Danny came back, having finished building the table. My wife wanted to know when I was going to clear the table so she could set it for supper. I suggested that we eat in the dining room.

Supper was served while I was in the middle of Step 12. It smelled good.

During Step 14, the children went upstairs to bathe and get ready for bed. They came down, all fresh and shining, kissed me on the cheek, then trooped off to bed. I could swear that Danny had winked at me.

I completed Steps 15 through 19 while my wife watched television in the den. The screen was almost visible through the open door. Finally, she went to bed.

(Step 20. Was a critical one because, in large letters on the instruction sheet was "IMPORTANT".) While I was gluing the fuselage halves together, I read on. The instruction said to spread the fins apart before

Collier

the cement set and insert the rudder (Part 38), then press and hold.

I couldn't find Part 38, rudder. The cement was drying and I couldn't find Part 38. I looked at every remaining part again, then through the box, then under the table. And, the fins bonded themselves together.

The cuckoo clock chirped twelve times.

(Step 21. Was the radio loop and canopy.) The canopy was clear plastic until I smeared a little glue on it. The pilot would have trouble seeing out the right side.

I tried to ignore the missing rudder by keeping the plane directly facing me. Each succeeding step became a little easier and, by the time I had completed Step 38, I had a thorough familiarity with all the parts, except number 38, of course.

Sunday morning dawned bright and clear. Rays of sunlight glared on the kitchen floor and the Grumman Navy Fighter F3F-3 was nearing completion.

(Step 39. The thread.) The bandaid on my finger prevented me from tying the thread. Nobody would notice if the thread was missing.

The toilet flushed and I heard footsteps on the stairs.

(Step 44. The final one.)

Danny came into the room, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles.

"Hi, Dad. Whatcha doing?"

I lifted the completed Grumman Navy Fighter F3F-3 and held it facing him head-on. I flicked the propeller to make it spin. I slid the cockpit canopy back and forth. I retracted the landing gear.

Collier

"Can I play with it now?", he asked.

I explained to him the difference between a toy and a model airplane. He shrugged and went into the den to watch television.

Gently gripping the fuselage between my thumb and forefinger, I held the plane aloft and took it through a series of climbs, banks and power dives. My wife came silently into the kitchen in her bathrobe. She looked at me without saying anything, then went to the counter to make a pot of coffee.

I took the model upstairs and, with the grey thread, I suspended it from the ceiling in Danny's room. I adjusted it so that it was strafing his bed and facing directly at his pillow. My younger son and daughter passed by on their way downstairs. I would have to give them some individual attention too.

Then, I went to the master bedroom, undressed, and lay down on the neatly made bed. Just before I fell asleep, I thought about the majestic clipper ship that the old storeowner had showed us, and of the little figurines rolling barrels along the deck.

Michael Daugherty

Out of Control

The ski season is over and the ski bums are clearing out. Adam is only moving down the valley though, to his brother's for a while. He walks on the roadside in the sand and melting snow, the town already feeling deserted compared to the party it had been three days before. He puts down his two big, black suitcases and tightens his packstraps. Across the street is Cooper's Saloon, now closed for the season.

Adam shakes his head and spits on the pavement. Higher than he thought, Adam sees the stones in the pavement as being more real than ever before. It feels good to be standing in his deserted town, with his things packed together at his feet on the side of the road. It feels good, life on the road.

He looks up to see a familiar Jeep CJ-7 lumbering toward him down the road. He smiles, but knows she will stop. When he opens the door, she just smiles.

"Hi, Sue."

Her smile reminds him of a girl he once knew. Vague images of her lips caressing the rim of a wineglass flash in his mind. The last he heard of her she was in Hawaii...or maybe it was Paris.

"Still going out to Illinois?", she asks.

"Maybe...who knows?"

"Well, if you're still interested, I'm headed out for Iowa. I could give you a ride as far as Des Moines."

Daugherty

"When do we leave?"

"Today."

They leave the valley as evening sets in, the hardtop Jeep overloaded with Sue's belongings and Adam's backpack. It feels good to be leaving. It feels good to be on the road.

Sue buys batteries to keep their tape player running all night. They prop it between them with their other supplies for the trip: a bag of fruit, a twelve-pack of Coors, a quarter-ounce of good Columbian weed, a stack of cassettes and a baggie of speed. They will drive all night.

Adam watches the terrain as they climb the pass. There are plenty of couloirs just waiting to be skied in, and plenty of cornices ready to fall. The craziest skiers would be out there risking avalanches and rockslides for a dip into the spring powder. Adam realizes that he doesn't mind missing the opportunity, that his friends would have left him no choice but to leave the security of a muddy valley for an alcohol-soaked, drug-altered climb to an icy peak and a quick descent. Most likely, a very quick descent. Adam grins to himself. Sounds like a good time. His thoughts are interrupted by the top of the pass and a glimpse of the Great Plains beyond the mountains, and his valley disappears from view behind his head, into the past.

A wrong turn in Denver determines their fate; they will drive through Kansas and Missouri instead of Nebraska. Just as well.

Just past the Kansas border, they switch drivers. Standing on the side of Route 80 in

Daugherty

in the darkness, Adam observes two mice playing on the pavement, illuminated by the Jeep's headlights. They chase each other, running in circles until one moves too far out onto the highway. A truck rumbles past, sending the mouse rolling on the pavement. The tiny legs squirm in the air and come to an abrupt stop. The other scampers quickly to the roadside grass.

Salina, Kansas: four a.m. at the truckstop. The cassettes have been played and flipped and played again. Kansas has been a monotone. Adam feels the eyes on his long hair as he walks in. He doesn't care. Who should care if he fits in at a Kansas truckstop?

By Kansas City the sun is rising and the Jeep seems to be finally warming up, cruising easily at higher speeds. Sue has been driving since Salina, Adam struggles to stay awake. He watches the city slowly coming to life: the businessmen and the kids on school buses. A year earlier at this time he might have been on a school bus. Kansas City, like any other city...just like any other.

Adam is at the wheel again in northern Missouri, feeling a little tired. He considers asking Sue for another speeder, but she is asleep, leaning against the door. Northern Missouri...funny, Adam thinks, but he has never really given any thought to the place and now he is here. Not much here. Highway. He resolves to get off the highway sometime and see more of the country. All he sees now is pavement and gentle yellow lines rushing smoothly beneath him. Eric Clapton is laying

Daugherty

down some electrifying blues on the tape machine. Adam tries to turn the volume up, but it is already on the highest notch. "When the day is done, and you wanna ride on...cocaine."

Sue sits across the table, still toying with the wineglass. Adam feels the blood rush from his head. He wants to kiss her. The music isn't right, though: "Don't forget this fact, you can't get it back...cocaine". Something isn't right. The song has been playing for much too long, forever. Sue's eyes stare through him in alarm as she throws the glass at his face. He wakes up.

The Jeep is bumping along the grass on the side of the highway at seventy miles an hour. Trying to turn it back up onto the road, he swerves, just missing a large sign. The Jeep does not respond to the wheel, though; top-heavy and sliding sideways, the Jeep slides onto the pavement, tires screeching.

Sue wakes up, screaming.

Adam looks at her panicked face. He has no control over the vehicle. "Oh fuck", he says calmly.

Staring straight ahead, his heart rises in his throat as he feels the Jeep tip. He watches as the pavement comes closer and closer. Everything inside the Jeep is falling. Clothing, ski equipment, tapes, food...all falling on top of Adam. No control now, he feels himself airborne, weightless.

"Don't forget this fact, you can't get it back..."

Daugherty

Nothing is still, everything in motion, the vehicle smashes sideways down onto the pavement. Adam feels everything falling on him. He loses weightlessness. His body jams crookedly up against the door, his face pressed up hard on the glass, his cheek flattened. He stares straight ahead and at the pavement rushing by a quarter inch away from his face. Stones and pebbles screech along, stuck between glass and pavement. Adam can feel them through the window. He stares straight ahead though, calm, and accepts his fate: he is going to die.

Home, still so far away. So long now since he has been there. Is this what you came for? Now finally, finally, you've got it.

The rocks keep coming through, scratching the glass next to his eyeball. He continues to stare down his fate, not blinking.

So far from home...so far now, farther than ever before. Forever...forever...silence.

"Adam, let's get out of here!"

He continues to stare calmly ahead.

"Let's get out of here. Get the keys."

He is startled into movement, squirming beneath everything to get loose. Someone is on top of the Jeep, opening the door to help them out. Like swimming to the surface after nearly drowning, he struggles with Sue to climb through the debris and up into daylight again. He looks around at the excited and startled faces of the motorists there to help them. He notes the motorhomes and cars stopped at roadside and he looks around silently, slowly,

Daugherty

at the faces. The men have been sent to investigate before anyone else.

Adam hops down, landing firmly on the ground. He immediately grabs a side of the Jeep and starts pulling.

"Well, how 'bout a hand with this thing?"

The motorists stare in awe. Sue is laughing hysterically.

Altamont, population 192. The name makes Adam think of the Stones concert where the guy was stabbed to death by the Hell's Angels. It's not a bad town, though. It was the nearest garage.

The Jeep sits in the dirt at the side of the garage. It's banged up pretty bad. The damage is mostly on one side. Everything is flattened and ground down as if it had been subject to a giant grindstone. The driver's side window is not broken. Deep scratches run the length of the window. Adam rubs his cheek where he can almost still feel the pebbles through the glass. He remembers Sue's words: "If that window had broken, your face would have been hamburger". She had said it with a smile. Adam was starting to wonder about Sue.

After the accident she had taken off with some guy in a Cadillac to get help, while Adam stayed with the overturned Jeep on the side of the highway and told people to go on, that help was on the way. There weren't that many people on the highway, but they all had to stop and ask if he needed help. Nice folks,

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but it was a hassle when he had to climb back in to search for the drugs, then he'd have to climb out and say that it was okay, that he was looking for something, that help was on the way. He was worried that they might have to go to the hospital, that the police would find the drugs. Adam found most of the stash, except for the gram of coke Sue had informed him about before she left in the Cadillac.

On a wooden bench outside the gas station, Adam rests his head against a weathered shingle. He runs his fingers along lines in the wood. It feels hard and real. Adam closes his eyes.

He hears someone rummaging around inside the Jeep. It is Sue, he knows, not opening his eyes. The door opens with a sick metallic creak as if one more touch will make it fall off. Footsteps pad in the dirt toward him, stopping near his feet. He feels cloth drop across his knees. A hand is on his shoulder and he feels a light nudge.

"Hey Adam...Adam...get up."

"I'm awake." He opens his eyes and sees Sue's small face near his. The eyes are wide and she is smiling. He looks into her pupils. They are dark and small. "I'm awake."

"Well, I would hope so", Sue giggles.

He pushes at her lightly and slides himself down the bench away from her. He rubs his face, hands coming away dirty from his beard. Sue is looking at the Jeep, still smiling a little. She has changed into clean clothes. Adam looks at his jacket she has

Daugherty

dropped across his knees. He picks it up and dirt falls loosely from folds of cloth.

"Put it on. I want some pictures of us with the Jeep."

"Are you kidding?"

Sue stands, tugging at Adam's arm. "C'mon, you're not camera shy now, are you?"

"What do you want a picture for?"

"My scrapbook", Sue laughs. She has a flat Kodak in her hand and giggles as Adam follows her. The mechanic is there and he looks at Sue as if knowing that she will say something stupid soon. Adam has decided that he likes the mechanic. Sue smiles as they stand together in front of the Jeep. Adam refuses to smile. "C'mon Adam, don't be so uptight. My parent's insurance will pay for it. Don't worry."

"Right, Sue." He tries to smile, but he can't make himself. The mechanic takes the picture.

Adam sees in the distance at the edge of a field, a boy his own age splitting wood. Absorbed in his work, the boy heaves the maul down into the wood, sending log halves, then quarters, in opposite directions. Adam hears the distant, crisp thwack of the maul sliding through the wood. I could be him, Adam is thinking. This could be home. I could have grown up here and nowhere else and be content to split wood out in the field on a nice spring day. This could be home.

Later he is with the mechanic trying to help him do something, anything, to the

Daugherty

lopsided vehicle. They have fixed the passenger side door so that it will close shut with about two inches of space between door and frame. The driver's side door will not open at all. Adam watches the mechanic pouring new oil into the engine and he tries to think of what the photograph will look like. He tries to imagine Sue standing in front of the Jeep with her stupid smile, and himself trying to smile, but wondering, wondering. The only picture he can make in his mind is of pavement rushing past his face and pebbles bumping his cheek through the glass. He tries to think of a farm on a hill, home, but sees only solemn abandoned faces floating past with the pavement, feeling only alone, seeing only death.

"Hold this out of my way", the mechanic says, motioning to some torn metal.

Adam's eyes are focused on a point two thousand miles away.

"Hey kid, hold on to this."

"You're lucky", Jake says.

"Yeah", Adam replies, looking out over the blinking lights of Rock Island. "We thought we were lucky. The cop told us we were lucky. The mechanic said we were lucky. All day we told ourselves how lucky we were."

"Some luck."

"Well...I made it here."

"Yeah, that's so." Jake grins at Adam, shaking his head. "Yeah, you made it, Adam." He looks back out over the lights. "Say, do

Daugherty

you want to sit in on some classes with me tomorrow?"

Adam slowly shakes his head. "I don't know Jake...I haven't been in school for a while. It could be kinda weird."

"Couldn't hurt. Pretty girls there too. Not much else to do but play frisbee."

"Yeah, I guess", Adam says. "Maybe. I guess that's the Mississippi down there."

"Sure...and that's Davenport on the other side. Iowa. We're old enough to drink over there."

"Hey yeah, that's right. Wanna go hit some bars?"

Jake sighs, looking away. "Naw, not really."

"Whatever, I don't care."

A warm breeze blows on their grassy hilltop in Illinois. Adam has felt nothing like it in what seems a long, long time. Breathing deeply of the fresh, dew-sprinkled breeze, Adam realizes he has missed spring. He shakes his head, chuckling. "Hey, Jake..."

"Yeah?"

"Remember when we were five years old and we got in trouble for running away? We got all adventurous and walked all the way past Harrison Street? Man, that was wild."

Jake laughs. "Yeah, it was. We were four years old, though, and we got as far as Eisenhower Street before the cops brought us home."

They are quiet again, and the wind blowing through the grass feels soothing to Adam.

Daugherty

"Well, Adam, you finally made it out to Colorado."

"Yep."

"Where to next."

"I don't know."

"Home?"

"No." Adam looks out, past the Mississippi, past Davenport...the west.
"There's lots of places."

The road stretches out infinitely before him and he regards it with a lethal sense of respect, maneuvering the Jeep with deadly precision across the grass at a frightening speed. Now, though, as his foot presses hard down on the accelerator, against the floor, he realizes his hands are at his sides. He realizes he is asleep and the wheel spins at no accord of his own. Wake up and grab that wheel! No! The Jeep spins. Everything spins. Wake up!

Gasping for breath and quite awake, Adam finds himself sitting upright. He is in a sweat-soaked sleeping bag on the floor of Jake's room. It takes a few moments to catch his breath. Jake and his roommate are still asleep. It's six o'clock. Adam knows he will not go back to sleep. He opens his journal and begins to write.

Friday morning

Uh yes, here I am in lovely Rock Island, Illinois, sitting in my sleeping bag, waiting for Jake to wake up. Left Ames, Iowa yesterday morning. Said goodbye to Sue through a closed

Daugherty

door. She was in bed doing coke with her friend from Aspen. Wish I could spend all my money on coke. These college kids bum me out.

So I walked across campus, past the huge stadium, and out to the highway. Had good rides, but I'm getting tired of hitchhiking. Best ride was a lawyer who talked all about literature and took me 150 miles. Filled me in on all the drug laws too. Still, I'm sick of thumbing. Oh well...

On the side of the highway, two young men step out of an old Charger. One takes a large backpack from the trunk and puts it on. Hands are shaken and both stand for an awkward moment. The Charger leaves and Adam walks alone, backwards up the highway with his thumb out. After a while, an old, beat up Jeep with a canvas roof and no doors stops for him.

Adam looks in to see a wild-eyed, bearded man with a six-pack of Bud at his side.

"Hop in", the man says.

"Where you headed?", Adam hesitates.

"Denver."

Adam smiles at the man. He looks up and down the highway seeing grass and farms and pavement. "Denver, you say."

"Yeah", the man says.

Adam spits on the ground and laughs. "Denver, that's a long way."

"Yeah", the man says from the doorless Jeep. "It's a long way."

Michael Finley

A Day at the Lakes

The water hills are
High today. Water
Hills meaning us, how
We break up the
Surface of things,
And make the lake we
Rise from more
Interesting.
Something burning and
Electric with
Insistence is in us,
Scratching, tapping
In our skulls. Some
Unnegotiable body of
Water rocks us in its
Arms, and in the
Distance collected
Like blue waves
Between us the man
Kisses deeply and
Longingly wife, and
The lightning
Sticking in our heads
Makes fire, each
Inhalation fills the
Sail, borne aloft by
A hand so strong the
Boat and sea obey.

Michael Finley

Morning Prayer

Everything points upwards here.
The prayer of the rails leading out
from the concrete block yard,
the breath of the street
escaping the hole
the man with the jack hammer
punctuates,
the furling of triplicates like
carbon doxologies
past desk tops and tucked into clip boards
and carried on up under arm in the shaft
of this city's newest building's
birthing,
the whistle weighting
the foreman's shirt
or the handful of pencils
waiting to be sharpened
or the childlike character of the salesman
arriving for the day's first prospect.
There is ambition in announcing Yes,
Let's
to the suffering
attending each new mornings' waking,
to men and women
wide eyed thinking
This is our chance,
let us try and
complete these walls
before dark.

Michael Finley

The Singer and the Song

The singer's message: I am only a boy
And my songs and my fiddle
My only true friends.

But the woman banging her glass
On the formica bartop is receiving
Transmissions of life in the wild,

She envisions geese lifting
From a fern-bog in the peninsula
Of a state she has never visited.

Between numbers she buys him a beer
And for a moment there is no Ramada Inn:
Young man, I want to kiss you everywhere.

But he clings to character, stammers
His Thank you, but home's a distance,
And the roads up Moorhead way are slick.

To no avail. She's deaf. Changing.
Already she's a brute brown bear
In the northerly wood,

Already enjoying the scratch
She knows comes next on her rump
On the broken spruce branches.

J. B. Goodenough

The Coming of the War

Mary Emma likes
Bread-and-sugar sandwiches,
White kittens,
Clementi, and
Toy soldiers in rows.

Mary Emma does not know
What is happening
On the other side
Of the hill,
Even now.

Mary Emma will eat
Crusts, and cats,
And hear no tunes,
And be enjoyed
By many men.

J. B. Goodenough

Keeper

If I drop crumbs
To mark the way
Of my own returning,
It is in the nature of things
You should scatter them.
I will not get out of the forest.

And if I choke on the apple
An old woman gives me
Out of the pannier she carries,
It is to be expected
You should bend the road-signs
To ward off random princes.

And if I lower my pale hair
At first light, weeping,
When witches doze,
It is fitting you should climb,
And knot my hair twice round my neck,
and end the story.

Fritz Hamilton

Miller in the Rain

Fog
turning to rain at
9th & Judah
people

pressed &
depressed beneath
the busstop shelter
except

mad Miller who
steps out to
participate in the
deluge by

throwing off all his
filthy clothes &
letting the rain bathe him
water

of cool mercy &
kindness streaming
down Miller's broken
gray flesh covered

with bruises &
wine sores over
his bloated belly &
emaciated bent limbs &

Hamilton

the people hiding in their
embittered rain gear look
on horrified but
mad Miller leaps &

dances around a
light pole
laughing

William Hart

All Men Fall Low

All men fall low
and in the season meant for snow
and on the faces fixed for sleep
the Lord his sheet replaces.
But mankind will reach
and with the seasons we increase;
on a pillow lies the Lord's pale cheek,
all heaven lies awaiting sleep.
Even in the seed our reaching sows
sleep's heaviness yearns to bow
what strange flowers we do not know.

Joan Payne Kincaid

Growing Up

Poor thing
should'a been a dancer

should'a been
Mother mama mom

said no
welfare doesn't cover that

Mama I want to study singing
she said welfare doesn't cover that

Mom I want to paint and go to college
See lines 6 and 8

She got off welfare
and sold her talent

for things like scholarships
and a husband

who filled her well
with babies

and they all danced away
with her life.

Richard Alan Malloy

Committed

Ira Dunham bent over one of his rabbit pens to check the food supply. There should be enough for today, he thought. He stood up again, but his shoulders remained slightly bent. He couldn't stand as straight as he used to, but he was still a handsome devil, with his full head of bushy white hair.

As Ira walked back to the barn to get the smoker - he wanted to check the hives - he crossed over the white spackled, winding backhouse sidewalk through the clutter of clucking chickens. He stopped abruptly.

A plump rooster lay motionless in the gravel. A bright spot of red glared against its white breast. "Damn! Those rotten kids again."

Ira reached down and grabbed the rooster's head. He was about to twirl the head free from the body when, suddenly, the pigeons on the barn roof burst into the air. He dropped the rooster and ran to the back of the yard where he spotted two young boys with BB guns running out from behind the barn. They fled down the alley and got away, but not without Ira giving them a good chase.

Afterward, Ira, still puffing heavily, sat down on the wooden folding chair under one of the walnut trees in the side yard. He removed his pipe from his breast pocket, and, without bothering to light it, began chewing on the stem. He looked out over his unpainted picket fence at the surrounding ranch style homes.

Malloy

The yards were manicured and sterile looking. He and Mabel had bought this place quite a few years ago - before Ira had retired from teaching, and before the neighborhood had changed. Now, the day didn't go by that somebody didn't complain to Ira about something - the rabbit pens when they'd get to stinking, or the outhouse; there was an ordinance against outhouses. Or they'd claim one of their kids had been stung by Ira's bees.

Lately, several neighbors had been trying to get him to move out to Hillcrest Manor, pretending they were concerned about him. A defenseless old man, they'd argue, shouldn't be living in this neighborhood alone - with all the break-ins and everything. "Bullshit", said Ira to himself, and he thought, they just want to get me out of here so they can make this place look like all the rest.

The crime was real though. Most of the neighborhood's residents had installed those fancy wrought iron gates on their doors, and bars on the windows. Again, it made every place look just like the next.

Now, Ira heard "anybody home?" from over by the house, and the sound of his front door spring being stretched out. He turned to look. That pushy damn Sam McDonald again. "Over here", yelled Ira as he placed his pipe back in his breast pocket.

The wooden screen door slammed shut as Sam McDonald released it and stepped off the doorstep. "Afternoon", he said as he came toward Ira. "Done anything yet, I mean about getting in out at Hillcrest?"

Malloy

"Hell no, I haven't. And I don't intend to either. Not for awhile, anyway. That place is for peeps. Nothing wrong with me. Why should I go out there? I got my own place here."

Dressed in blue putter pants and shirt, a pair of two-tone sneakers and a straw hat, Sam McDonald looked like a real dude. "Now Ira. Only a few people out there are senile or anything like that. Most of them are just normal older people who realize they're better off out there. You know how many break-ins and things go on. We're only thinking of your own good when some of us, like Amy VanDork and her husband and the Smiths and myself, try to make you see the light."

Ira reached down and scooped up several bulbous green jacketed walnuts and began pitching them toward the wooden bucket half hidden in the high grass. "For my own good, huh? Get the hell off my own place for my own good? Is that what you're saying?"

Sam McDonald stared crossly down at Ira. "That might be just exactly what I'm saying. There's been talk about forcing you out, and don't think we can't do it, either."

"Don't think this is an idle threat. You don't belong here..."

"No, I think it's all of you that don't belong. I was here first. Remember?"

Sam McDonald kicked a walnut through the grass. "We could easily have you put out there, you know. Is that what you want? You're in violation of I don't know how many laws here, the way you live. And, frankly, I seriously question your mental competence."

Malloy

Smith's kids have been telling stories lately about how you chase them down the alley with a whip."

Ira grinned. "A whip, huh? Not a bad idea for those damned hoody kids."

"Well, that tears it", said Sam McDonald. "If you won't be sensible, we'll just have you declared mentally incompetent, and have you committed out there at Hillcrest, that's all."

"Get lost, will you."

"You'll find out", said Sam McDonald as he walked away.

Ira decided to forego checking the hives. He went in the house, and, for a few minutes, paced back and forth across the floor register between the kitchen and the front room.

He stopped in front of the hutch and stared at the portrait of Mabel. She still gave him strength. Her arms proudly graced their only baby son - dead only weeks after the portrait was taken - killed by the water heater explosion and fire that had destroyed their first home.

A knock came at the door. "Yeh, come on in", yelled Ira.

The door swung open. Skinny Frank Smith stood in the doorway, huffing and puffing like a reindeer in heat - his alcoholic nose lit up like Rudolf. He shook one finger violently at Ira. "If I ever catch you chasing my boys down the alley, I'll..."

Ira interrupted. "If I ever catch your kids shooting BB's at my chickens again, I'll stick their barrels in their skinny little behinds. Now, get the hell out of my doorway and have your delirium tremens somewhere else."

Malloy

"You've had it, old man", vowed Frank Smith as he did a nervous pivot and pranced away from Ira's door.

Ira continued pacing the floor. He counted the windows of the tiny single story wood frame. Two in the front room, one in the kitchen, one in the bedroom. And the doors. He'd call and get an estimate. There should be enough in the bank. If the neighbors followed through on their promise, he'd have no need for money anyway - where he'd be going.

Later that same week, Ira walked around the house puffing his pipe, checking on the workers at his windows. He passed a shirtless young man on a ladder. "Make sure those bars are on tight", yelled Ira jokingly. "I don't want to catch a cold."

Now, Ira noticed a hole in the rotting boards covering the old cistern. He pointed his pipe at the boards and yelled again. "Be careful you don't fall in here."

"Oh gee, thanks, Mack. I already stuck my leg in that sucker earlier."

Ira grinned sardonically. "Well, be careful, will you? Those rotten boards are hard to replace."

By late afternoon, the workers had gone and Ira was seated under the walnut trees again, examining the house's austere new appearance in the contrasty late sunlight, when he noticed the motley assemblage of determined looking neighbors marching up the sidewalk from down the block across the street. The group approached him now in a straight line, crossing the street at a diagonal.

Malloy

Sam McDonald was the general with his lieutenants, Frank Smith and dowdy Amy VanDork and others, at his side. They pulled up their high horses, and, without bothering to dismount, Sam McDonald began voicing the decree. "We'll get right to the point. We want you out of the neighborhood, so you're out, and that's it. I don't know who you think you're trying to fool with those security bars you've installed."

Ira replied sarcastically, "I thought you were worried about me, Sam."

"We're a hell of a lot more worried about getting this whole goddamned eyesore mess of a property you live on cleaned up, and you know it too. Making one small, pretensive little last minute improvement won't stave this thing off. We've fought with you and fought with you, and we've decided you're getting the hell out, and that's it."

Ira rolled his eyes and pretended disconcern. He puckered his lips and whistled softly.

"You better be listening, old man. We've got signatures from everybody who's anybody in this neighborhood, and we're taking it before a judge tomorrow. Make it easy on yourself, and start packing. We'll be out to see you tomorrow night." The troop turned about face and rode away.

Ira pattered in the yard for the rest of the afternoon. He chewed a stringy stalk of sour rhubarb, and he breathed deeply of aromatic garden loam, and, when it was almost dark, he went into the house and sat at the

Malloy

table in the shadowy kitchen gazing out through the barred back window at the barn until it was just a silhouette in the moonlight.

The next day, Ira stayed inside, going through pictures he hadn't looked at for years and unfolding Mabel's crocheted tablecloths and doilies.

When it was evening, Ira opened the door to the hutch and removed the framed photo of Mabel. He slipped the photo out of the frame and inserted it inside his shirt. And now, Ira sat down on the sofa to wait.

After a few minutes, the knock came at the front door. Ira didn't get up, but answered in a calm but audible tone. "Just come in."

The door opened. There was Sam McDonald, and Frank Smith, and Amy VanDork, but they had a new leader - an unrecognized man in a necktie stepped forward with some papers in one hand.

"Please, all of you, just come in and sit down", said Ira. "I won't cause any fuss. Maybe you could explain to me a little about Hillcrest. I mean, help me with the adjustment."

The sofa, the old rocker, and chairs brought in from the kitchen were all occupied, and, for a few minutes, Ira calmly discussed with the congregation what was proposed for him.

"The concensus", said the businesslike, necktied spokesman, "is that you're no longer responsible".

"I understand", said Ira calmly as his eyes studied the torn linoleum.

Malloy

Ira's composure seemed to set everyone at ease. Frank Smith's glowing beak had faded slightly. And Sam McDonald had gone back to his old line. "You know, Ira, I'm really happy to see you take this in stride. After all, it's for your own good, and I'm sure everybody here wants what's best for you."

Now Ira stood up slowly, his lowered eyes and bent shoulders exaggeratedly demonstrating resignation. "Well, I'll be with you in a minute. Got to make a trip out back." And then, to reassure the throng of questioning eyes, "The toilet's out back, you know".

"How positively disgusting", said Amy VanDork candidly.

Appearing humbled, crushed and broken, Ira walked unopposed into the kitchen and out the back door. He quietly closed the iron gate and inserted and latched the padlock. Then, moving quickly, he walked around the bedroom side of the small house to the front door. He slammed the gate and locked it.

The quiet gathering inside suddenly burst into frenzied realization. Amy VanDork pressed her fat face against the barred front window and shouted like a warehouse foreman. "You goddamned crazy old man! What the hell do you think you're pulling?"

Now, Ira jogged back to the barn, removed the barn lanterns from their hooks, and returned to splash kerosene against the weathered, flaking side boards of the old house. He reached into his breast pocket for a

Malloy

book of matches, and lit the wick on one of the lanterns. And then moved back and threw the lantern against the siding. It exploded, and the flames quickly crawled up the siding and ignited the rotting eaves. From beyond the flames came screaming and crying and swearing. And in the tall grass of the side yard an old man sat down and mumbled to himself. "What the hell, I'm not responsible."

Janet McCann

Iron Pills

Iron flecks
invade the tongue
the space behind the tongue

so that afterwards
the cold water
tastes of the peeling pump

remembers the pipes
thru all the layers of earth
renews the blood

now the words come
iron soldiers
marching across the snow

Walt Phillips

Ashram in the Rain

after twenty-two days
they were pronounced
cleansed
their names
having fallen away
but on the twenty-fifth
one little sucker
hollered
call me Ishmael!
and it was on
again

Walt Phillips

Let-Down

it is my birthday
and they throw a big party
in a vacant warehouse
after the meal
at a big picnic table
i must wear a metal ring around my head
and circle the group
arm in arm
with somebody's grandmother
later two men sit me down
in a side room
and tell me i've lost touch

all this ritual
and i don't even
get a present

Michael Ritterbrown

Five Years

The sharp cold, carried on the wind, cut easily through his denim jacket. Shivering, he paused for a moment in the shelter of a deserted newsstand. The pack hit the ground with a dull thud, and he stood watching the intricate patterns of swirling snow in the dim glow of the streetlight. Each flake struggled against the frantic dance into which it was whipped by the wind, and then settled with infinite grace, suddenly indistinguishable from the rest. His fingers traveled absently through his hair, as if the gesture could somehow give order to his flood of memories. Comfort came to him with the realization of his own anonymity in a sleeping city that neither knew nor cared about his presence. The people in their snow covered houses cared nothing for him. Only a few would even remember, and it was for the sake of their memory that he had returned. The appearance of a slowly moving patrol car made him shoulder his pack and move on; no night to be picked up for vagrancy.

Stopping beneath a familiar neon sign, he wondered if the inside of the bar remained as unchanged as its slick formal facade. A couple lurched gayly out, followed by a rush of conversation, and the faint tinklings of a piano. He turned quickly, and felt the shudder of a fear much colder than the night. It was a memory of himself, before. The couple fell into a long kiss, and he shuffled on, glad that no such kiss was asked of him.

Ritterbrown

The narrow corridors of shops and office buildings gave way gradually to broad streets lined with the winter skeletons of trees and large houses that stared with impenetrable comfort at the passing figure. His feet were wet inside the thick-soled boots, and would have been cold had he taken the time to notice. He had learned, however, that to acknowledge such discomforts was to admit a need for the passive security from which he had taken flight.

The house was large and white, and its green trim seemed black in the darkness. The silence was as pure and unbroken as the fear he felt staring at the place that had been his home for more than ten years. Inside slept a daughter and a son, whose memory of a father would have faded with the years into the realm of dim recollection. There also slept a woman who had been his wife, and must long since, he thought, have found someone else to sleep beside her.

He moved up the walk toward the door, on the other side of which had lounged a life of quietly complacent wealth. He had been paid well in this life for writing stories about people for whom he had no empathy or tolerance. It had been a farce, he thought, a beautiful farce in which there had been so much joy that he had denied the fallacy within himself until it was too late, and nothing remained but hatred. He no longer wrote at all. Someday, he hoped, he would again; when he had forgotten the ease of writing for profit and discovered once again the joy of giving back to the world something he had seen in it.

Ritterbrown

The fear swelled in him again, this time almost closing off his throat. He sat down quickly in the snow, breathing carefully as he hugged his knees to his chest. A light went on upstairs, and he thought for a moment that she had seen him. Lowering his head to his knees, he fought for a coherent phrase which he could speak when she saw that it was him. None came, but soon he realized that the light had nothing to do with him at all, and when he looked up, the window was black once more.

A long time after the light went out he got up and brushed the snow from his faded jeans.

The ring of keys had stayed with him always in the right-hand pocket. They were hard and sharp and very real. He had tried once to throw them into a muddy Missouri river, but his hand had refused to open and allow them to be released.

The lock turned easily, and he stepped into the entry hall.

The Oriental rug was new, but the small oak table, bought on their first anniversary, still stood beside the door, covered as always with keys and mail. He ran a finger across its surface, but the touch of the wood was unremembered.

A light sweat broke across his forehead as he began to ascend the stairs, and he paused at the landing, leaning heavily on the rail. He wished he were in New Mexico again, without the fear or the memories.

The door to his son's room was slightly ajar, and the man slipped in without a sound.

Ritterbrown

The teddy bears had been replaced by the maniacal grins of rock musicians. The air was still and heavy with the thick, sweet smell of a quickly-changing body. A picture on the night table caught the man's eye. It sat beside a newly-installed telephone, and was of a girl. In the dim white light from the window it was hard to tell if she was really pretty. He hoped she was.

He was suddenly very aware of himself in the close darkness with his son and he wondered what he would say if the boy were to awaken. "Hello, I'm your father. I've come back to see you." He whispered the words, trying them out against the air. They came back empty and foolish, and he brushed them away with his hand. Perhaps, he thought, he would wait for the boy to question him, but he knew there were no answers; none, at any rate which could buy forgiveness.

The man wished, as he slipped out, that he could have the picture on the night stand.

His daughter was younger, and her room was almost as he remembered it. He had always thought it seemed the perfect room for a little girl. The pastel colors and lace curtains softened its edges, and the great canopy bed was like a downy cloud.

The girl slept peacefully beneath a lavender comforter, the sound of her breath rising and falling in slow, even strokes.

A small, furry horse had fallen from its place in the bed beside her, and now lay stranded on the floor. He stared at it for a long moment, but did not reach to retrieve it. When he moved it surprised him, and he realized how long he had stood motionless.

Ritterbrown

The woman's door was closed, and he stood before it, the melting snow from his boots leaving large wet spots on the carpet. When finally he turned the knob and pushed open the door, his legs began to melt, and the breath caught again in his throat.

She was asleep; asleep and alone. He was sorry that there was no one for her to hold, but his relief was unquestionably more. As he moved closer, he remembered the rhythm of her breathing, and the shape of her face when her eyes were closed.

He stood, thighs pressed against the edge of the bed, and watched her sleep.

He wanted, more than anything, to touch her. Finally, as the first slow gray light of dawn began on the horizon, his hand moved toward her, and in the same second he stopped. His hand retreated quickly to his pocket where it stayed.

"I love you", he whispered, and meant it. It was all he had to say, and all he could bring himself to do.

He put the ring of keys down gently on the small table in the hall, and the latch clicked behind him.

Jack Shadoian

New Space

I parcel new space
with boxcar transiency.
fleas in your hair hum
"home on the range".
we are now the future,
far from who beat who
or oil deliveries;
we are now our own
compulsive entertainment.

Jack Shadoian

Night Muzak, Live

she breathes obscenely
into telephones,
midnight to dawn.
once in a while,
somebody,
a Canadian tour guide
maybe, or an unemployed
symphony conductor,
hears the sound of her
good hands,
cold and scratchy
over muzak traffic,
writing poems perhaps,
or fresh philosophy.

Tom Sheehan

Past Tenses

The house is cool
as axe heel.
Overhead, in a room
with one outside wall,
my grandfather coughs;
door opening, closing,
the whole way of a tunnel.

Air stings with rye
in a dark glass,
mated to a boiled
potato skinned white.

His eye marks
the walls, his diet
all airs above
rectangle
of memory,
the rolling
in my mind.

What happens
on a round smooth
stone is hands,
fingers of
old voices,

dust, bones,
sunlight falling
in May.

Tom Sheehan

Storm Gods

The message
floated down from the house:
the storm was up and running.

I had seen,
on Atlantic saucer edge,
a monopoly of dark vapors

dog-shaking,
rising grubbed as hoboos
from the thicket sleeps of

constant dread.
Onto their ragged bosoms
they pulled the liquored sun,

cupped it up, swallowed the moist draft.
Thirst becomes mere as echoes.

Rain drops, cold
as memory, not shaped of heart,
seem never to

have been warm,
fell the despair of hornets
on soft patches of summer skin.

I watched for
welts to appear as aches,
the harsh necessity of pain

Sheehan

we deed to
ourselves as insignia, chevrons
worn as ransom for experience.

Gods, I thought,
are made this way. A mortal,
pressed by pain, discounting both

size and sense
under swirling firmaments,
under the toss of darkness

storming clouds
exaggerate, leans inwardly upon
that small pod boasting of immortality.

Tom Sheehan

These Waters are Closed after Labor Day
Except for Fly Fishing
Only

The fields are wet
with early hunters.
Fish float their daring
on my stream.

Gasps of tree roots
exaggerate the song
a stone sings
in my ears,

and clouds lean on
a last bright outring
of moon October lets
go of.

Friends continue
to carry themselves
away in black dress,
their slow steps mocking
what their business is about.

When we fished
the Pine River
you trod like an Indian,
when you broke twigs
it was to start a fire.

The gray ghosting flies
you tied all winter
tumbled as slowly
as a pigeon a hawk cut
out of the speedlane,

Sheehan

hackles dusting light-
gray the first slivers
of sunlight, bare breaths,
thin as perfume,
teasing trout.

Next May the mayflies
will consecrate
the river again,
I will wake early
on the warring earth,
feel the tumult
in my hands,

and let go of it
only then, when the flies
come like paratroopers
over the drop zone.

Hugh T. Smith

Dad

Stroke broken man with expensive hat,
Father, your bent cane is tapping
Memories of that florid satin
Shirt I loathed.

And you sat dangling your living dead
Arm, terrier hacking the Elm
Stump. Home from school I sped
So no one could see what we shared.

Dad, you loved poker like a dealer,
But there was bad luck in the hand
You drew from life: a dollar's
Worth of health, a joke, and early death.

Once you begged me for a light
Before the ones I called my friends.
I had no light I'd share
The day I cast you down like a spent match.

Hugh T. Smith

In Search of Snakes

Hiding the bike in alfalfa stubble,
I scrambled through rubble of sycamore
Stump. Bumping down cliff face,
Dungarees rolled to brown knees,
I waded the icy water,
Flat rocks cracking
Like maracas below.

Beyond the riffles
Out on the brush-cluttered isle
Of bleached stones,
Smooth as pie shells,
I crouched in a thicket
The floods had left,
Ready to correct moccasins
As the sun fell to shadow
Across the Indian river.

Then out from the belly
Of a dead La Salle
Eased a flat-eyed reptile
Like wet soap leaving a hand,
Crimson tongue flickering blind.
I could feel the burden
Of that brainless face,
The silent and curved fangs.

Cocking the oiled gun across my knee,
I raised its solemn weight,
Squinting along the barrel,
Clean trigger alive to my touch.
Afterwards dangling from my handlebars
The evil jounced crazily
Like a length
Of blood-bruised, black rope.

A-Z

Survival Training

I've spent months
concealed in your desert,
learning how to dodge
your gunfire, running
from hillock to hole
for shelter.

I've lived on what
I could find; an occasional
bird or date palm. Once
I scared off a jackel
and ate its expected feast.
Water was always a problem;
I remember hearing trickling
under every rock. I drank
when I could and stored
against need; there was
never, ever, enough.

I moved mainly at night
trying to find
some safety zone,
a well-defended place
where your tactics
wouldn't work, or where
we could give up maneuvers
and negotiate securely.
I never found that spot.

I have to thank you now;
after being recalled,
presented with highest honors,
I understand what deprivations
your expert teaching has
trained me to endure.

A-Z

Survival Training

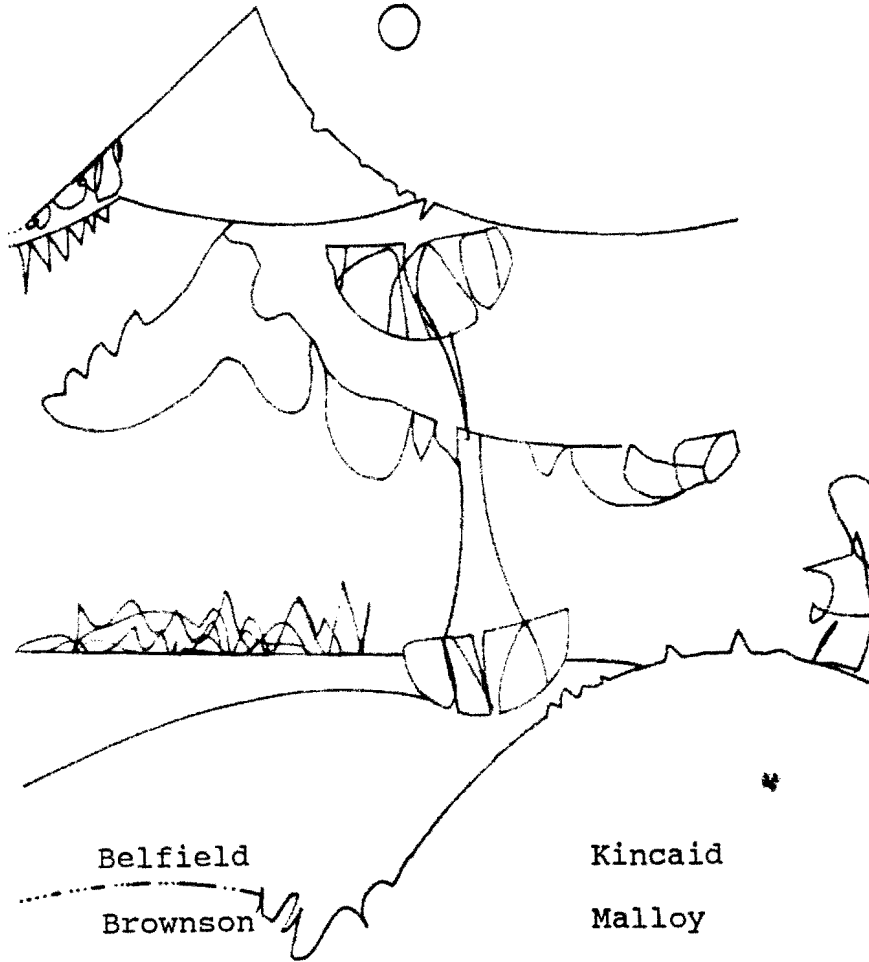
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2 dollars



Belfield

Brownson

Collier

Dougherty

Finley

Goodenough

Hamilton

Hart

Kincaid

Malloy

McCann

Phillips

Ritterbrown

Shadoian

Sheehan

Smith

A-Z

